

GENDER AND RENEWABLE ENERGY

Releasing the energies of women

BUILDING A LEGISLATIVE AGENDA TOWARDS GENDER MAINSTREAMING IN THE SADC RENEWABLE ENERGY SECTOR

INTRODUCTION

Gender inequality is inhibiting southern Africa from realizing its full potential as the majority of women are not part of development initiatives. According to the African Human Development Report, sub-Saharan Africa lost an estimated US\$2.5 trillion in 2018 due to gender inequality, a figure which rose from US\$105 billion in 2014. The lack of legal frameworks that adequately address gender concerns in new and emerging development issues remains one of the major obstacles in advancing gender equality. For example, the legal framework in the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Renewable Energy (RE) sector presents little or no opportunity for women to equally participate in designing home energy systems, accessing resources and making decisions. This is one of the

major challenges within the RE sector that requires attention through the reform of the legal framework guided by international and regional policy frameworks.

REGIONAL POLICY FRAMEWORKS

The existing policy framework in the SADC energy sector places emphasis on the availability of sufficient, reliable, cost effective energy services. The policy framework addresses broader SADC objectives, which include investment attraction and promoting competitiveness and trade as a means of eradicating poverty, aligned with the environmentally sustainable use of energy resources. The main policy instruments concerning energy in the SADC region are the:

- ❖ Protocol on Energy (1998);
- ❖ Energy Cooperation Policy and Strategy (1996);

- ❖ Energy Action Plan (1997) and (2000);
- ❖ Regional Energy Access Strategy and Action Plan (2010); and,
- ❖ Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency Strategy and Action Plan (REEESAP).

REEESAP is intended to be used as a point of reference for developing national RE frameworks, as well as inform all strategic interventions and national level action plans to achieve development goals that extend beyond the energy sector, such as women empowerment and gender equality, poverty eradication, access to clean water, improved public health and education, and increased food production.

The energy protocol acknowledges the important roles played by women and men in the implementation of energy programmes and urges Member States to “ensure that the development and use of energy takes cognisance of the gender realities of the region.” While the protocol and REEESAP acknowledge these roles, the realities across the region make it reasonable to conclude that the present structures and processes within the sector have not fully addressed the inequalities and subsequently energy-related challenges faced by women. The current status suggests that the region has not been adequately recognizing the

differentiated roles and needs of women and men, with the former being at a disadvantage.

One of the targets set by the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development (adopted in 2008, entered into force in 2013, revised in 2016) is that by 2030, the region should have reached 50/50 gender representation in decision-making positions and access to productive resources. This target may not be reached if the legal landscape is not reformed to address the gender realities existing in the energy sector and the RE sector in particular. Women will continue to bear the burden of unpaid work through gathering firewood for cooking, heating and lighting and being exposed to household air pollution, linked to burning fuels such as wood, animal waste and charcoal which is responsible for an estimated 2.8 million deaths every year, mostly among women and children (REN21, 2018). Greater access to energy services can improve health and wellbeing, free up time, and enable economic empowerment.

NATIONAL LEGAL FRAMEWORKS

Despite the guiding regional frameworks, the development of RE legislation which caters for the needs of women and men in SADC Member States is minimal. The majority of the

legislation towards the expansion of renewable energy currently lacks consideration of the opportunities for enhancing gender equality and development outcomes. For example, there are limited legal and regulatory frameworks which encourage the creation of market incentives to promote the distribution and access to modern fuels and technologies that respond to the energy needs of women. Further, gender-aware legislation that encourages investment in energy infrastructure which directly meets the energy needs of women is minimal, thus making the labour contributions of women less

productive. In cases where energy supply infrastructure or technology is available, women are often hindered in their access and use by lack of finance, appliances, information, training or education.

Further, the gender neutral approach that most legislation has overlooks the differential impacts and benefits for men and women, and may inadvertently perpetuate gender inequalities. For example, allowing citizens to obtain subsidized electricity connections or liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) registration is a welcome initiative, however if the process does not take into consideration gendered differences,

Effective Practice from Malawi

In Malawi, women from Karonga district expressed concern over lack of access to electricity in their community and presented a petition to policy makers for an increase in rural electrification. The women lobbied for more access to off grid energy solutions to increase job opportunities and income which would contribute to addressing gender inequalities in the district. As a result, the Malawian Women's Parliamentary Caucus, took up the issue with Parliament and in September 2019, the Malawian Parliament passed a tax amendment legislation that removed import duty on all solar products to help increase access to alternative energy sources. As a result, women in the Karonga district and elsewhere now have easier access to renewable energy technologies which are affordable, and they are now venturing into economically advancing activities.

women may be at a disadvantage. For example, the process may require a bank account and extensive paperwork, which places women and their enterprises at a disadvantage as women often lack access to funds or collateral such as land. Persistent patriarchal practices which have not been thoroughly addressed prevent women from owning this land, controlling productive assets or accessing credit facilities.

BUILDING A LEGISLATIVE AGENDA

The process of building a legislative agenda for mainstreaming gender in the Renewable Energy sector requires collaborative effort. To initiate this process, the Southern African Research and Documentation Centre (SARDC) in collaboration with the SADC Parliamentary Forum (PF) and the Parliament of Zimbabwe jointly convened a virtual workshop on Mainstreaming Gender in the Renewable Energy sector. The workshop engaged Parliamentarians as they are strategically positioned and wield the constitutional authority of law-making, oversight and representation. The Parliamentarians, representing energy and gender

portfolios in SADC Member States discussed the challenges faced by women in the RE sector and ways to address them through legislation. Some of the challenges include:

- Inability to afford renewable energy technology;
- Inadequate access to energy which limits women from accessing decent wage employment, educational opportunities and economically enhancing options as they spend time sourcing wood for lighting, heating and cooking;
- Exposure to household air pollution;
- Exclusion from skills and clean energy technology programs and projects that have the potential to improve livelihoods;
- Under-representation of women in decision-making positions in the energy sector; and
- Risks from travelling long distances and gathering firewood in secluded areas.

Through the policy dialogue, Parliamentarians discussed the importance of mainstreaming gender in the sector and shared effective practices and options to set up a more enabling environment for mainstreaming gender in renewable

energy through strengthening regulatory, legal and institutional frameworks.

The first step is for parliaments or parliamentary committees to direct responsible institutions to conduct gender reviews of frameworks in the RE sector. The reviews will provide in-depth analysis of planning processes, budgets and institutional capacities of ministries to implement gender-mainstreaming strategies. Through the review processes, specific ways in which gender issues can be addressed through existing national renewable energy policy formulation and

implementation will be identified. In cases where laws are not in existence, parliament portfolio committees responsible for energy are encouraged to initiate gender-aware bills, and see them through to the approval and implementation stage. The bills will ensure women as well as men participate and benefit from renewable energy, both as consumers and as entrepreneurs. These bills should be aligned to international and regional frameworks so as to move at the same pace and in the same direction as other countries in the region and beyond.

Effective Practice from Zambia

In Zambia, a gender audit of the National Energy Policy culminated in the Zambia Gender and Energy Mainstreaming Strategy (2011–2013). The audit revealed that gender perspectives were not clearly articulated in the National Energy Policy and were not considered relevant during the planning of energy programmes or projects. As a result, the Zambia Electricity Supply Corporation (ZESCO) began implementing the Increased Access to Electricity Service (IAES) project which enables women to be more effective economic agents, using rights-based development approaches that focus on greater economic opportunities and the freedom to work with security and dignity. In 2019, Zambia put in place a Renewable Energy Financing Framework to support the implementation of the Renewable Energy Policy and its Gender Action Plan. The policy and action plan seek to improve business opportunities and investments for women and people living with disabilities through providing access and platforms for increased participation in clean and renewable energy. The framework places emphasis on awareness raising and the training of women to participate in RE projects.

During the development or amendment of bills, parliamentary committees should encourage citizens and civic organizations to contribute to the process. These processes will allow for challenges and concerns to be expressed and solutions drafted to feed into the bills. Through access to RE services, manual labour will be substituted by more convenient and comfortable technologies; pollution will be reduced through removal of energy forms such as wood fuel and kerosene; opportunities will be created for income generation; education and health should improve; and there will be access to information and entertainment. Since women are the primary users, and often the producers, of energy, their involvement in the development of laws ensures effective legislation.

Within the rights of its oversight function, Parliament is expected to make input, approve and monitor national budgets. Parliamentarians can ensure that gender-responsive budgeting is applied in the national budgeting processes and specific measures are put in place, such as ensuring subsidies for renewable energy technologies. If government supports alternative sources of energy such as solar power projects through various fiscal incentives relating to

importation of equipment and respective accessories, marginalized women who were previously facing challenges in accessing RETs will be at an advantage. Lighting, for example, will enable greater flexibility to work after hours which has a significant impact when time is scarce. It will enable children to study and ensure that girls spend more time on studies than household chores.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Parliamentarians have a clear role to drive legislative advances, provide oversight, make input in and approve budgets. Action on the part of parliamentarians is fundamental to securing renewable energy for all. Parliamentarians within the confines and influence of their roles are urged to aid the following processes which are drawn from the analysis above:

- ❖ **Gender audit-** Parliamentarians are encouraged to engage stakeholders to conduct gender audits to analyse legislation, regulations, allocations, expenditures and taxation among others in their respective Member States and assess their impact on women. The gender audits will reveal gaps which parliamentarians should address through the appropriate legislation.

- ❖ **Develop/amend laws** - Parliamentarians are encouraged to draft bills which address the gender gaps in the RE sector.
- ❖ **Subsidies/incentives** - Parliamentary committees responsible for energy should consider drafting bills that ensure the provision of subsidies for consumers and producers. Targeted subsidies can promote the use and uptake of modern fuels (such as LPG) and technologies for cooking, heating, lighting, access to information and income generating activities. Ensuring that the consumer is able to afford the product, and at the same time, the entrepreneur has access to funds to meet both investment and recurring costs.
- ❖ **Budgets**- The legislature has a role in authorising public expenditures and fund-raising. Over recent years, there is stronger engagement of the parliament across the full budget cycle. During the drafting of national budgets, it is the role of parliamentarians to ensure national budgetary processes are gender responsive. Parliament and its committees, in this case the committee responsible for energy should include gender and energy related issues in the annual budget before presentation for approval.
- ❖ **Credit facilities** –The creation of

credit facilities, will assist women entrepreneurs to have access to funds for securing RETs for household and business activities. These credit facilities can help to address persistent practices that prevent women from owning land or controlling productive assets.

- ❖ **Engage the public** –During the drafting or amending of bills at Portfolio Committees, parliamentarians are encouraged to provide an avenue for citizens and civic organizations to contribute to the drafting process, through written submissions or participation in open committee sessions.
- ❖ **Interpellation** - Parliamentarians should allow interpellation on the topic of gender and renewable energy. This will allow responsible Ministries to stand before the Parliament or committee and be answerable to the Members of Parliament on various issues, including their efforts of mainstreaming of gender in the RE sector.

SADC PF

- ❖ **Develop regional framework** - The SADC PF is encouraged to drive a process towards the development of a regional framework to assist Parliamentarians in achieving their respective agendas, and to

guide Member States in developing and strengthening legal instruments that mainstream gender in the Renewable Energy sector.

- ❖ Establish technical group – A technical group should be established to monitor the development of the legislations and provide guidance as necessary.
- ❖ Develop knowledge materials- SADC PF is encouraged to engage partners for the development and sharing of knowledge materials and case studies to support the regional and national processes.

CONCLUSION

For Southern Africa to emerge as a competitive and effective contributor to the global economy and benefit

from the vast potential of its renewable energies, it has to have in place sound Renewable Energy frameworks that incorporate gender considerations. Recognizing the gender dimensions in access to renewable energy services can increase social benefits, reduce conflicts within communities and make projects more inclusive, efficient, profitable and sustainable. Access to electricity can lead to greater economic opportunities for men and women, and free up large amounts of time and labour as well as improving health and education within communities. Parliamentarians can ensure that this is achieved through driving the establishment of gender-sensitive legislation.

This policy brief is produced by the Beyond Inequalities Gender Institute (BI) of the Southern African Research and Documentation Centre (SARDC) through a project on Mainstreaming Gender in the SADC Renewable Energy Sector funded by the Austrian Development Agency. The information is drawn from related knowledge materials from this project. The policy brief and related information are available on www.sardc.net. Responsibility for the content of this publication lies entirely with the authors. The information and analysis do not reflect the official opinion of the Austrian Development Agency. *October 2020*



Julius K Nyerere House
15 Downie Avenue, Belgravia,
Harare, Zimbabwe
Tel +263 242 791141 Email sardc@sardc.net
Website www.sardc.net Knowledge for Development

